

**Expert Group Meeting on “Practical Strategies to Promote Social Integration:  
Lessons learned from Existing policies and practices”  
Accra, Ghana, 17 – 19 November 2009**

**Opening remarks by Mr. Jean-Pierre Gonnot  
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United Nations Department of Economic and Social Development (UNDESA)**

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you all to this expert group meeting on behalf of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat.

First of all, I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to the Government of Ghana for hosting this expert group meeting. It is fitting that a meeting devoted to social integration be held in Ghana, a country that has been at the forefront in developing a vision of an inclusive society.

My special thanks go to the Honourable Stephen Amoanor-Kwao, Minister of Employment and Social Welfare and to the Honourable Antwi Boasiako Sekyere, Deputy Minister, and to the staff of the Ministry for all the support provided during the preparation and organization of the meeting. In this regard, I would like to express my appreciation to Mr. Akuffo, Chief Director and Mr. Ablo, Deputy Director for Social Development, for the pivotal roles they played.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to other prominent government officials and Members of Parliament, who are here with us today and thank them for their interest in participating in this meeting. Your presence here further illustrates the firm commitment of the Government of Ghana to advance social integration and inclusion.

I am delighted to welcome the expert participants from Australia, Barbados, Brazil, Croatia, Egypt, India, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, and Viet Nam, who have traveled all the way to Accra to share their perspectives and insights. Let me welcome also the representatives of the African Union Commission, the United Nations Economic Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the Economic Commission for Latin America and Caribbean (ECLAC), and the Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) who have come to lend their expertise.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to Mr. Daouda Toure, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Ghana, and his staff, in particular, Mr. Komatsubara, Ms.

Banya, and Ms. Ghanson, for their dedicated cooperation in the preparation and organization of this workshop. Without their support, this meeting could not be possible.

I also wish to acknowledge the presence of representatives from the UN agencies and development partners based in Ghana and thank them for their interest and participation in the meeting

We are delighted to have such a diverse and prominent group of experts and participants with us to discuss and debate how to translate the vision of an inclusive society into concrete actions. We are here to learn what has worked, and what has not. To discover what needs to be strengthened, and to uncover innovative approaches.

As you are all aware, this expert group meeting is convened in the context of Economic and Social Council resolution 2008/19 in which the Council decided that the priority theme for the 2009-2010 review and policy cycle of the Commission for Social Development should be “social integration,” taking into account its relationship with poverty eradication and full employment and decent work for all.

The outcomes of this expert group meeting, along with that of a complementary meeting held in New York two weeks ago from 2–4 November 2009, will provide important inputs to the work of the Commission. The New York meeting of experts focused on how to craft and incorporate social integration policies and principles into broader poverty eradication and employment strategies. In contrast, the main objective of this expert group meeting is to capture the experiences, successes, and challenges of countries in their concrete efforts to promote social integration.

The World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995 established the concept of social integration as one of the three pillars of social development. Along with the other main objectives, eradication of poverty and creation of productive employment, Member States made a commitment to promote social integration through fostering inclusive societies – “society for all.” However, thus far, the issue of social integration has not received the same level of attention as the other two pillars of social development, even though it is increasingly recognized that these three objectives are inter-related and mutually reinforcing, and need to be pursued simultaneously.

During the review session of the Commission for Social Development held earlier this year, Member States began the debate on social integration, focusing on clarifying the content and meaning of the theme. This session of the Commission also provided an opportunity to bring renewed international attention to the important role of social integration in achieving overarching development goals.

At the upcoming policy session, which will take place in February 2010, delegates of the Commission, under the Chairmanship of H.E. Leslie Kojo Christian of Ghana, will negotiate an action-oriented policy outcome in the form of a resolution which will later be submitted to the Economic and Social Council for adoption. In the past 15 years since

the Copenhagen Summit, this is the first time that the United Nations will seek to adopt a resolution on social integration. Considering the current global context, it is critical that this resolution provide the much needed guidance to Member States in their efforts to implement their commitments in promoting social integration – especially with regard to policy formulation and setting goals and targets.

The interaction among the group of experts gathered here is intended to stimulate fresh thinking on the development of practical strategies to promote social integration and social inclusion at the national and regional level by focusing on selected potential areas where concrete steps can be taken. By drawing lessons from a selected number of national experiences in various regions, the meeting will review challenges and opportunities of existing policies, strategies, and practices aimed at promoting social integration and inclusion; it will examine national mechanisms effective in implementing such policies, strategies, and practices; and will also identify national capacity gaps to promote social integration and inclusion and explore areas for strengthening that capacity.

Following two days of presentations and dialogue, we expect to produce a set of insightful, concrete, and action-oriented recommendations on social integration. Let me re-emphasize that this is the first since Copenhagen that the membership of the United Nations will be addressing the issue of social integration.

Given this unique opportunity to advance an issue that has long been considered challenging, I urge you, in developing your recommendations, to focus on paving a way forward that is evidence-based, can be supported by consensus, and achieve long-term goals.

I want to thank you all again for taking the time to be with us for the next few days to contribute to this important work to advance social development for all. I wish you much success in the meeting, and look forward to its outcome.

Thank you.